

Domestic Warning Center's Name Reflects Only A Portion Of Its Mission

Press Release

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Posted Sep 24, 2004 at 12:00:PM MDT

PETERSON AFB, Colo. ? It is called the domestic warning center but the name does not adequately reflect the center's diverse responsibilities.

Even a name like the ?Domestic Warning, Current and Future Operations and Civil Support Coordination Center? would fall short in identifying all the tasks assigned to U.S. Northern Command's domestic warning center (DWC) here.

The DWC tracks potential threats ? man-made and natural ? assesses them and provides a ?heads up? so the command can prevent, deter and defeat land and maritime threats. When deterrence is not possible, the center coordinates federal military support to assist civil authorities in mitigating the aftereffects.

?Obviously when there is a disaster, first responders are the most important element with the state National Guard as their principal back up,? said Navy Capt. Brad Johanson, the DWC's chief of current operations. He said the center coordinates back up assistance for local, state and other federal agencies, ?covering any gaps in services.? Johanson explained that the military provides ?specialized assistance? that may not be available in the civilian sector.

For instance, in response to requests from the U.S. Secret Service, the DWC arranged for explosive ordnance teams to sweep the Democratic and Republican National Convention sites for bombs and other explosive devices. The DWC makes similar arrangements for other high-interest level events, such as the U.N. General Assembly now in session. ?We can also provide back-up forces when requested,? Johanson said.

Following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorists attacks, U.S. leadership created USNORTHCOM to defend the homeland, its territories and interests and to coordinate all Department of Defense civil support during a presidential declared emergency or disaster. The latter mission allows USNORTHCOM to draw resources ? including manpower ? from any branch of the U.S. military and Coast Guard.

Johanson said the DWC is a ?major player? in both the command's homeland defense and civil support missions. Lately, though the job that has consumed the lion's share of the center's attention is tracking hurricanes and orchestrating DOD's support to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

?Every day, about six times per day, we have a variety of teleconferences with federal, state and local agencies to coordinate DOD support,? said Johanson. ?Also, our current operations group communicates daily with the (DOD) Joint Staff, FEMA and other federal agencies so we'll be able to respond quickly to requests for assistance.?

In the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan, which caused more than 50 deaths and billions of dollars in damages from the Florida Panhandle to Pennsylvania, the DWC secured long-range satellite communications capabilities, emergency supplies and medical assistance for the areas hardest hit by the storm.

Under current laws, DOD provides civil support only when local, state and other federal resources have been exhausted or overwhelmed. Also, the lead federal agency in charge of the crisis must request DOD assistance and the Secretary of Defense must approve that request before USNORTHCOM can take action. However, this does not preclude the DWC from identifying resources and recommending to the Secretary of Defense where they should be pre-positioned.

For Hurricane Ivan, the DWC arranged for 500 tractor-trailers loaded with ice, clean water, food

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and other FEMA supplies to be pre-positioned out of harm's way but as close to the expected storm areas as possible. In this case, that was military installations in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Kentucky and North Carolina.

Not yet scaled back from the 100-hour per week schedule started in mid-August when Tropical Storm Charley began swirling off the coast of Africa, the DWC is geared up to provide aid should Hurricane Jeanne hit Florida as predicted by National Weather Service officials.

We have four meteorologists who stand watch 24/7 for the duration of all the hurricanes. Johanson said that although the center collaborates with the National Hurricane Center, it also maintains awareness of storms to update USNORTHCOM leadership on issues such as when the storm will make landfall and expected devastation.

The center uses special high-tech equipment not only to predict a storm's path, but also to estimate where storm surges and flooding are likely to occur and the areas most likely to lose electrical power and require debris removal.

Although the center tries to schedule relief time for the 70-plus staff members, this is not always possible because some staff members have irreplaceable talents, Johanson said.

The DWC staff is comprised primarily of officers in grades O-4 to O-6; senior-level civilians; contractors, most of whom are retired officers; and a handful of enlisted members. Like the rest of the command, staff members are from all four branches of the military as well as the Air and Army National Guard.

Besides hurricanes, the DWC has also been busy coordinating wild land firefighting assignments for specially configured C-130s. To date, the aircraft and crews have flown more than 300 sorties, spreading fire retardant in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and central Washington.